

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 22, 2025

The Honorable Marco Rubio
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Rubio,

We write to urge the Trump administration to swiftly demand that Israel allow free and independent press access to Gaza. We welcome reports that the Trump administration has been requesting that the Netanyahu government allow foreign journalists into Gaza now that a ceasefire is in place¹, and we urge the administration to amplify this pressure and prioritize this request as part of the ongoing talks with the Netanyahu government on the path to peace in the region. Free and independent press access to Gaza is crucial to facilitate the public's right to uncensored and impartial information, to monitor implementation of the current ceasefire, and to ensure that Americans, Israelis, and the rest of the world have a factual accounting of what is occurring on the ground in Gaza.

As you know, the Netanyahu government has imposed a foreign press blockade since October 7, 2023. To date, the Israeli Defense Forces has only allowed highly controlled and censored military-escorted trips into Gaza for select international media who are not permitted to freely engage with Palestinians. These trips only last for a few hours and follow the itineraries set by the military. In August 2025, BBC was taken into Gaza by the Israeli military and reported "The brief visit was highly controlled and offered no access to Palestinians, or other areas of Gaza. Military censorship laws in Israel mean that military personnel were shown our material before publication."²

Meaningful and unimpeded press access in Gaza is necessary for the international community to have unbiased information to understand the rapidly changing environment, especially as the administration plans for Gaza's post-war governance in accordance with regional partners and a reformed Palestinian Authority. There is high demand for oversight of the distribution of humanitarian aid, in-depth understanding of how Gazans want to see their future shaped without Hamas, and critical verification of how all parties are either adhering to or violating the fragile ceasefire.

¹ Magid, Jacob. "With Ceasefire in Place, US Renews Request for Israel to Allow Foreign Press into Gaza." *The Times of Israel* , 3 Nov. 2025, www.timesofisrael.com/with-ceasefire-in-place-us-renews-plea-for-israel-to-allow-foreign-press-into-gaza/.

² Williamson, Lucy. "Inside Gaza, BBC Sees Total Devastation after Two Years of War." *BBC*, 5 Nov. 2025, www.bbc.com/news/articles/c0rp4lrdv8ko.

Foreign journalists have consistently reported in high-risk, high-casualty, and volatile armed conflicts - including Iraq, Afghanistan, and Ukraine – without military or government approval or monitoring. In fact, the Foreign Press Association – which represents journalists working for international news organizations reporting from Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza Strip – has repeatedly called for immediate access to Gaza and even petitioned the Israeli High Court of Justice demanding such access. At a court hearing on October 23, the Israeli government acknowledged that the ceasefire constituted a significant change in circumstances and justified a review of policy towards press access, and yet the state requested and was granted another 30-day delay to update its position.³ This month, the Israeli High Court of Justice granted the 9th delay since the petition was filed in September 2024.⁴ We urge you to use this opportunity to press the Netanyahu government to open Gaza's borders to foreign journalists.

The Netanyahu government's insistence on barring journalists from Gaza on safety and security grounds counters journalistic precedent and stands in stark contrast to the alarming number of Palestinian journalists killed in Gaza. The world has relied on brave Palestinian journalists and media for uncensored reporting from Gaza at great personal risk. At least 206 journalists and media workers have been killed in Gaza by the Israeli armed forces⁵, the most in any modern conflict. The Netanyahu government has both denied and justified targeting journalists.

Following the August 10 killing of six journalists by an airstrike on a hospital complex in Gaza, the IDF released a statement saying the IDF "does not target journalists as such." At the same time, the Netanyahu government repeated its accusation that a prominent Palestinian journalist killed in the attack, Anas Al-Sharif, was a Hamas-linked terrorist without providing any reliable evidence.⁶

Press freedom and freedom of expression are protected as fundamental rights even during wartime under Article 19 of the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political rights, guaranteeing the right to opinions without interference and "freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers."⁷ Israel has ratified this covenant.⁸ We encourage this Administration to remind the Netanyahu government of its commitment to protecting free and independent press and the safety of journalists.

As the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza continues and the ceasefire continues to take shape, it is all the more important that the foreign journalists have free and independent access to the Strip to

³ "Israeli Supreme Court Grants New Delay in Petition on Access to Gaza for Journalists." *Reporters without Borders* , 23 Oct. 2025, rsf.org/en/israeli-supreme-court-grants-new-delay-petition-access-gaza-journalists.

⁴ "FPA Statement on the Continued Ban on Access to Gaza [December 9, 2025] - FPA." *FPA* -, 9 Dec. 2025, foreignpressassociation.online/2025/12/09/fpa-statement-on-the-continued-ban-on-access-to-gaza-december-9-2025/.

⁵ "Journalist Casualties in the Israel-Gaza War." *Committee to Protect Journalists* , 4 Dec. 2025, cpj.org/2023/10/journalist-casualties-in-the-israel-gaza-conflict/.

⁶ "Israel Hits Gaza Hospital, Killing at Least 20 People, Including Five Journalists." *Reuters*, 25 Aug. 2025, www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-hits-gaza-hospital-killing-least-20-people-including-five-journalists-2025-08-25/.

⁷ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations*, 16 Dec. 1966, www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights

⁸ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. *United Nations Treaty Collection*, adopted 16 Dec. 1966, treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?chapter=4&clang=_en&mtdsg_no=IV-4&src=TREATY.

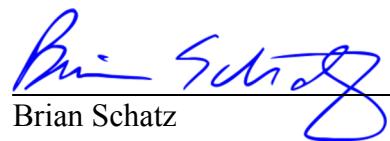
provide a window to the rest of the world. We urge this administration to swiftly demand free and independent press access to Gaza.

Given the urgent concerns outlined in this letter, we request a response within two weeks.

Sincerely,



Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



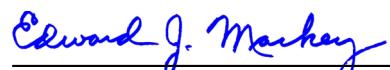
Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



Peter Welch
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



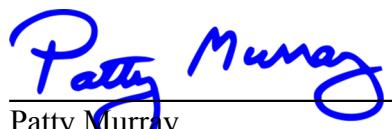
Tina Smith
United States Senator



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



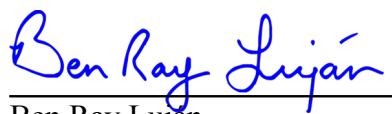
Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Patty Murray
United States Senator



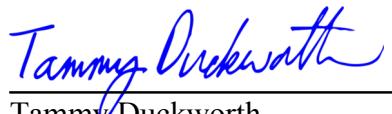
Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator



Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator